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# THE QUEST.

BY MARGARET SHERWOOD.

*Dedicated to the Scholars who die Young.*

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“And He placed at the East of the Garden of Eden the Cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life.”

WEAVING a purple web within the loom,  
His mother's mother told one day a tale—  
While the gold sunlight touched his hair to gold—  
Of the dim glory of a garden where  
God's wisdom bloomed in fashion of a tree:  
An angel, in a pulsing robe of light,  
Guarded the pathway; and a sword of flame,  
Gleaming at dawn to eastward, barred the way,  
Lest men should pass and pluck the heart of life  
From out its secret hiding. Rapt he stood,  
Nor heard aught else henceforward; for the air  
Murmured about his ears with tongues of flame,  
And unseen fingers beckoned.

As he sat

Guarding his sheep in the still grass, a palm  
Called through the noonday heat across the sand  
And the faint mountain blue beyond the north  
Called with the beauty of earth's farthest rim.  
By aspen pale or poplar, listening,  
He heard the echo stirring in the leaves  
Which every tree that puts forth root and bud  
Hath from the Tree of Life. Lily and rose,  
Remembering the garden where they grew,  
Whispered of beauty to make dim the eyes;  
Thistle and thorn dreamed with him of the spot

Where they had never grown; but none could tell  
The path forgotten, and the ancient wind,  
Which sang of having kissed the very leaves,  
Sped from him when he prayed it lead the way.

So, betwixt dream and dream, he grew to man,  
Driving the plough across the field at dawn,  
Folding the flocks at dusk, as others used,  
Yet all was faint before him. Word or cry  
Smote on his ear as something come too far  
For him to catch the meaning. Near and near,  
He heard the murmur of the Tree of God.

One day the almond-trees upon the hill  
Flushed silently to bloom, and with the spring  
A maiden passed. Behold! the tongues of flame  
Spoke through her hair and flickered in her eyes.  
White foot by foot bathed in the rippling stream,  
They sat where green grass marked the waterways  
With forehead touched to forehead; and the sun  
Flung on them glory of long golden days,  
The shadowy night crowned them with shining stars.

Leading his flock one morn along the hill,  
Eastward he saw a sword of flame, and paused,  
Blinded by glory, stung by very joy  
To hunger for the far horizon line.

Her drooping hair crushed dark against his breast,  
The woman softly wept: "I bid you stay."  
"Ay," he made answer, "in mine ears; and yet  
Within my heart of hearts you bid me go;"  
Then kissed her lips and pondered how to choose—  
Fingers that beckoned, or dear hands that clung.  
When dawn shone on his face he rose, and passed  
Beyond the flat roofs of his kin, beyond  
The drooping water-willows, and the paths  
The kine had trodden daily to the fields,

Beyond the faint blue mountains to the north,—  
And men forgot him as he searched for God.

Gray days and green he wandered, asking now  
The reeds beside the river, now the folk  
Gathered about the door at eventide,  
And now the birds that skimmed the upper air  
On wide, unwearied wings; but none could send  
His yearning feet on their appointed way.  
Ruddy the vats at treading of the grape,  
Yellow the harvest-fields, and sweet the flowers,—  
Red lily flushed with color of the sun,  
White lily, pure with passion of its flame,—  
That bloomed beside him: women's words were kind,  
Friendly the men who trod the threshing-floors,  
Yet none could stay him. Once he saw the light  
Of sunset gleaming through a distant tree  
On a far mountain, and pressed on through dark  
And pathless ways, flint-covered; but he found  
Naught save the great green cedar of the north,  
With hawk and eagle nesting in its boughs,  
And turned again to follow still the joy  
Of bleeding feet that question not their goal.

Olive and fig were gathered, and the trees  
Bared their brown branches to the greening fields;  
Faint with the hope of everlasting spring  
Grew the young wheat and the narcissus flower,  
When he who walked the inner hills alone  
Came one day to a spot, withdrawn, apart,  
And, kneeling, worshipped; for upon his eyes  
Smote perfect glory man may not behold.  
Now the great murmur of the sacred tree  
Sang loud within his ears, nor did he heed  
The voice that bade him backward lest he die.  
Light fell upon his forehead as he stormed  
The garden of the secret of the Lord,  
Alone, undaunted, met the flashing sword  
And died, being glad to die so, in the light.

The woman, who had followed him afar,  
Saw not the angel, nor the tree, nor sword,  
Nor dreamed the garden; but she saw the face  
On which the shadow of the Tree of Life  
Had flickered in his passing, and she knew  
The beauty that had won his soul to flame,—  
Nor asked for other wisdom till she died.

MARGARET SHERWOOD.